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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: ALLEGED MILITARY PLOT TO UNDERMINE RULING AKP
SPARKS CONTROVERSY

REF: A. ANKARA 625
[1](#)B. ANKRA 368 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol-Mil Counselor Anthony Godfrey, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Speculation swirled in the Turkish press following the June 12 publication in Turkish daily "Taraf" of a "secret military plan" allegedly authored by an active duty colonel serving in the TGS' Psy-Ops department to undermine the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the religious movement led by Fetullah Gulen. TGS has launched an investigating into the claim and instituted a "media blackout" on discussing the details contained in the report published by Taraf. CHOD Basbug has rejected any military involvement in the plan and vowed to get to the bottom of the claim. PM Erdogan has characterized the report as evidence of a continued assault against democracy, the rule of law and his party. The secularist camp is calling into question the authenticity of the report, asserting that it may have been planted as a way to further erode confidence in the military. The Taraf report is the latest salvo in the ongoing, shadowy struggle between the ruling AKP and secularist forces suspicious of AKP and its philosophical allies' intentions. The truth behind the story may never be known, but the military has once again been put on the defensive. End Summary.

Friday Bombshell

[1](#)2. (SBU) Taraf, a liberal daily newspaper with a track record of running stories critical of the military, published what it alleged to be a secret document drafted by Colonel Dursun Cicek, an active duty officer serving in the Turkish General Staff's (TGS) "Information Support Department" (Note: We understand this department is the office responsible for psy-ops under the TGS Operations Directorate. End Note). The report, dated April 2009, is entitled "The Plan Against Fundamentalism," and proposed steps to undermine "centers of fundamentalism," including the ruling AKP and the "Gulenist movement" (supporters of Fetullah Gulen). The plan included recommendations such as planting weapons and ammunition in facilities known to be affiliated with the Gulen movement to create the impression that the movement was involved in terrorism. The plan was reportedly discovered by police during a search of the office of an Ergenekon suspect, retired lieutenant Serdar Ozturk. Ozturk's attorney has asserted that the document was planted in his client's office.

The Military Reacts

¶3. (SBU) Reacting to this breaking story, TGS spokesperson BG Metin Gurak said during a regularly scheduled press briefing on June 12 that the military was investigating the report and had issued a media blackout against reporting on the details of the report published in Taraf. On Monday, June 15, the TGS published a lengthy statement denying the involvement of any military units in the production of the report published by Taraf. While noting that the matter remained under investigation and the TGS is working to determine the authenticity of the document, the TGS statement reaffirmed the military's commitment to rule of law and stated that the TGS would not tolerate the presence of anyone who failed to comply with the principles of democracy and the rule of law. The statement also vowed to punish those responsible if the document is determined to be genuine. The statement also noted that, in the event that the document is "the product of fraud," the Turkish Armed Forces will "work hard to find out who prepared this document and the motives behind it."

¶4. (SBU) When asked by journalists whether he ordered the drafting of the plan, GEN Basbug called the question "insulting." Reiterating the TGS statement, Basbug vowed to get to the bottom of the claim. In his comments to the press, Basbug said that Colonel Cicek, when questioned, denied authoring the plan. Basbug is scheduled to meet with PM Erdogan on June 16 (Comment: In previous periods of civil-military tension, these Basbug-Erdogan meetings have served to dial back the rhetoric. End Comment).

PM Erdogan Makes Hay

¶5. (SBU) Prime Minister Erdogan was quick to capitalize on this story. During speeches to AKP gatherings in the eastern Turkish cities of Kars and Sanliurfa over the weekend of June 13-14, he cited the document as evidence of efforts to divide his party and undermine democracy. He said the plan appeared to reflect new tactics for countering the AKP following its "election victory" during municipal elections held in March (Note: Erdogan's claim aside, informed observers have generally interpreted the results of the March local elections as a set back for the AKP. End Note.) Erdogan vowed to launch an investigation into the allegations and, "if necessary, we will file suits against those responsible for the maneuvers against our party. We will not remain indifferent to the illegal process targeting the AKP."

Alternative Explanations

¶6. (SBU) "Milliyet," one of Turkey's leading secularist dailies, ran a front-page editorial on Sunday, June 14, on the Taraf story. It offered two alternative explanations for the report. The first is that the document is authentic and the Turkish military is engaged in a plot against the standing government, which would be a great shame for Turkish democracy. The second alternative, according to the column, is that the document is a fabrication and part of a plot to provoke further tensions between the military and the government. The editorial warned that if the latter explanation is true, the story could be an omen of the rising influence of those pressing for a greater role for religion in Turkey, particularly the Gulenist movement.

¶7. (C) Ersel Aydinli, an expert on civil-military relations and chair of international relations at Bilkent University, questioned the veracity of the plan published in Taraf. He said AKP supporters and supporters of the Gulenist movement are not one and the same and that there has been bickering between the two groups recently. The report, if true, could end the bickering between these two camps and help them focus on an external threat: the Turkish military. The existence of the report is almost too convenient for those hoping to end the infighting between the AKP and Gulen and to undermine the military at the same time, Aydinli concluded.

¶8. (SBU) One additional alternative has been suggested by the TGS statement and reinforced by a follow-up story published in Taraf on June 15: elements within the military drafted the plan without authorization from their chain of command. The TGS statement stressed that the authenticity of the report is still being investigated, and allowed for the possibility that the report might have been written by a member of the military. The June 15 Taraf article cites an anonymous "retired army general" who said he warned General Basbug when Basbug was still Turkish Land Forces Commander (prior to August 2008) of the team that was responsible for drafting the plan against fundamentalism. The anonymous source said drafting of the plan was initiated in January 2009 and was briefed up to superiors in February and March of 2009. The unnamed general absolved Cicek and said that he was only acting under orders, suggesting that more senior officers may be involved in the alleged plot.

Comment

¶9. (C) This story is surfacing shortly after additional questions were raised concerning arms caches uncovered in April 2009 as part of the Ergenekon investigation. In a nationally televised press conference in April (ref a), General Basbug rejected claims that any of the uncovered arms caches linked to a still at-large Ergenekon suspect were part of the military's inventory. According to a report published in the Turkish daily "Star" in early June, State-owned Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation (MKEK), the manufacturer of the uncovered armaments, produced a report asserting that, based on company records, at least some of the weapons found were produced for and delivered to the Turkish military. The MKEK report casts doubt on the credibility of GEN Basbug and the military's denial of any involvement in Ergenekon-related activities.

¶10. (C) In this conspiratorial-minded environment, the truth behind this alleged secret plan may never be known. Given reports of the modus vivendi established between PM Erdogan and CHOD Basbug, we have no reason to believe that the TGS leadership under Basbug would order or endorse such a plan.

This latest episode, taking place within the broader context of the Ergenekon investigation, has again put the TGS on the defensive by raising further questions about the Turkish military's commitment to rule of law and democracy.

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